

IOSIE: A Method for Analyzing Student Behavioral Problems

RICHARD T. SCARPACI

Abstract: The author argues for a rational method to analyze behavior problems and proposes a method of identifying the problem, the objectives to be achieved, the solution, the implementation, and the evaluation (IOSIE) as a practical approach to assist teachers in resolving most classroom behavior management problems. The approach draws heavily on well-known classroom management strategies and encourages readers to put those into place by using the five-step IOSIE approach. The letters in the term IOSIE represent steps to follow when analyzing acts of classroom misbehavior.

Keywords: guidance, behavior, counseling, discipline, group guidance, self-discipline

A five-step process for looking at and reflecting on solutions for behavioral classroom problems is the method described here. The process requires one to identify causes of misconduct, determine objectives, and propose a solution. Implementation provides an opportunity to evaluate the executed solutions (IOSIE; figure 1). The first letter of each italicized word indicates the steps to follow when analyzing misbehavior in classrooms. If this procedure is followed, disruption and discipline problems should be lessened in classrooms.

Identifying the Problem

Problem behavior analysis is something all teachers have to master. The procedure is unchanging; one cannot fix what is not recognized as broken. The process is not as simple as it might seem at first. Do not be deceived by appearances or biases when attempting to identify the cause of a problem (Danforth and Boyle 2000). A boy who is arguing with a girl in the class-

room may not be the instigator of misbehavior. Children who are talking loudly are not automatically being disruptive; a student who is threatening another student is not necessarily the culprit. Do not jump to false conclusions.

In classrooms a problem only exists if it impinges negatively on learning. If this is the case, the teacher must assess seriousness and weigh the problem's impact on student learning. Acting out behaviors, such as threats, loud talking, arguing, and fighting, are problems that must be addressed immediately, but incomplete assignments, attendance, sloppy work, and lost books, although readily identifiable problems, can wait to be resolved. Another category that must be remedied without delay is incidents such as cheating, slander, theft, safety that involves moral codes, or physical well-being.

Problems concerning withdrawal behaviors such as not paying attention, depression, drugs, and alcohol indicate a desire to flee from reality and must be dealt with expeditiously (Curwin 1997). It should be understood that most misbehavior is caused by frustration, ignorance, conflict, displacement, or misunderstanding rules and procedures. In contrast, the reasons for misbehavior can be identified as a desire to achieve one of four immediate goals: attention, power, revenge, or to avoid failure. In the final analysis the choice as to what constitutes a problem is the teacher's decision (Glasser 1990, 1997; Mager and Piper 1997).

Objectives

Teachers are fortunate when it comes to objectives. In classroom behavioral situations two objectives always

Richard T. Scarpaci is an assistant professor and director of Field Experiences at St. John's University Staten Island campus, New York. He has taught courses in management and methods as well as conducted Child Abuse and Violence Prevention Seminars.
Copyright © 2007 Heldref Publications

- The "I" represents the first step in the process, to **identify** and assess the problem.
- The "O" stands for the **objectives** that you wish to achieve through your intervention.
- The "S" stands for the **solution**, which should be the result of the plan you put into effect to achieve your objectives.
- The "I" indicates the **implementation** of your plan and the procedures to be followed by the people who should be involved.
- The acronym concludes with the letter "E" that stands for your **evaluation** and reflection on results.

FIGURE 1. IOSIE analysis model.

remain the same: to facilitate learning and encourage self-discipline (Scarpaci 2007). All other objectives relate directly to identifying problems. Objectives describe, in measurable terms, the behaviors needed to attain the desired results within a specific time frame: for example, Billy will complete all ten incomplete assignments satisfactorily by the end of the semester.

Objectives are specific statements of a learner's behavior. They are the outcomes one wishes to obtain within a specific time limit. They can also be described as statements that answer two questions: What do I want my students to know? How will I know if my students understand? Good objectives show learners what is expected, how the work will be done, and what the minimum standards are. They are explicit, quantifiable, and achievable; they create an end result that can be met within a specific time frame.

Solutions

One of the keys to the IOSIE process is selection of strategy. The steps are not rigid but should be followed in sequence. The method presumes that there are three generic approaches to solutions for classroom misbehavior: a consequence, group guidance, and a guidance approach. A consequence approach such as assertive discipline (Canter and Canter 1976) implies consequences for improper actions. A group guidance approach such as judicious discipline (Gathercoal 1993) encourages classes to establish rules to prevent inappropriate actions. Finally, in a guidance approach such as reality therapy (Glasser 1999), the teacher counsels the rule offender, encouraging students to take ownership of problems. The purpose of each strategy is to assist students to develop self-discipline and responsibility for their actions. A good strategy must be comprehensive and contain in its design components both preventive and intervention procedures. The ideal is to prevent problems before they occur.

Implementation

The most difficult step is the actual implementation. Putting solutions into action is not simply a "just do it" sequence. Basic questions must be addressed before implementation: Who is to implement the solution? How do you get the cooperation and support of every-

one involved? How long do you expect it will take before a positive result is accomplished? What happens if the solution does not work?

The answers to the first two questions are easy when the teacher is the implementer. They only become difficult when support and cooperation of parents, staff, and professionals outside of the school need to be elicited. The answer to the third question depends on the severity of the problem, the objectives set, and the resistance met. The personalities of all involved parties should also be considered. The only way to resolve the final question is to go back to the drawing board and attempt a different approach to the problem. When these four questions are satisfactorily answered a guide to evaluation is created.

Evaluation

Assessment of results is often forgotten, ignored, or done incorrectly by teachers. The easiest way to evaluate is to look at your objectives. Are they specific, measurable, and attainable within a defined time frame? Outcomes are wishes achieved within an explicit period and should be easily recognizable and readily assessable. The basic premise of any evaluation is to determine if you achieved what you set out to achieve. If the success lasts for only a brief time, then the solution was not really appropriate. An example would be a child who no longer fights at lunchtime but fights after school. Obviously something is wrong with this picture. If the results are not positive, the whole process must be reviewed. Was the problem really identified? Were the objectives attainable in the time span anticipated? Was the proposed solution appropriate for the objectives you wished to achieve? Was the implementation done correctly? Are you sure you did not succeed, even partially?

Sample Case Studies

Below are three case studies, one for each of the basic approaches, beginning with a case study that lends itself to a consequence strategy, which might afford positive results if implemented properly.

Consequence Approach

Billy Williams, a seventeen-year-old in your twelfth-grade mathematics class, has been accused in an

unsigned note of extorting lunch money from his classmates. Billy has a prior record of supposed misdeeds. One specifically, although never proven, was when he was blamed for the recent rash of drug activity outside the school grounds. Billy's misdeeds have never been proven because no one has stood up and charged Billy with any specific misbehavior. For all intents and purposes, he lives under a cloud of suspicion. There are those who believe that Billy is innocent of any major wrongdoing, but their numbers are few. You have spoken to Billy on numerous occasions with regard to his lack of class work, homework, and general deportment during your class with little or no results. He claims he does not know why everyone thinks he is a criminal, because he has not done anything wrong. When you ask about his homework, he again changes the subject by confiding to you that even the principal has threatened him for no reason. He believes people dislike him because he is African American and therefore make up false rumors.

His classmates as well as most of the student body are in deathly fear of Billy because of his physical size and menacing presence. There is a rumor that he has been in fights after school, yet no one has come forward to point him out for any wrongdoing. A colleague tells you that you also have reason to fear for your own safety. Recently, Ms. Kumar had her tires slashed. Ms. Kumar believes the slashing was retaliation for her failing Billy for the first quarter of the semester. You also had expected to fail Billy before this morning's incident when Billy came to you and explained that he had to pass your class to graduate. He pleaded for you to give him a break and pass him. He said if you did not pass him, his parents would kick him out of their house when he turned eighteen.

IOSIE Analysis Using a Consequence Approach

Identify the Problem

What exactly is the problem in this case? Is it the unsigned note claiming that Billy is extorting money? Is it Billy's prior record of misdeeds? Is it Billy's lack of class work, homework, and poor deportment? Is it Billy's charge of racial bias on the part of those who dislike him? Is it the fights after school or Billy's menacing demeanor? Could it be Ms. Kumar's belief that you are in danger because she thinks Billy slashed her tires for failing him during the first quarter? Or could it be the problem Billy presented to you this morning when he said his parents would throw him out of their house if he did not graduate?

You can see that it is not always easy to determine the problem in any given situation. There are usually a number of problems. Look at the potential problems we identified and place them in some type of priority order to better understand the case. A prior record of

unproven misdeeds and unsigned accusations should go to the bottom of any list of potential problems. Rumors regarding one's behavior outside of school are usually just gossip and unconfirmed. Billy's size and someone's unfounded accusation regarding slashed tires are not your problems. Billy's belief that he is the butt of racial prejudice is certainly a concern. It is not necessarily a problem that you face with him, because he has confided in you. Billy's academic performance and poor deportment are the immediate problem that you face. His feelings regarding prejudice should also be addressed as a long-term problem.

Objectives

Once the problem has been identified you have to determine your objectives. What is it exactly that you want Billy to do? Based on your identification of the problem, it would appear that you would expect Billy to improve his academic performance and his general behavior in your class for the remainder of the school term. With regard to his personal feelings with "racial bias," you should refer Billy to the appropriate support personnel within your school. This would usually be the school guidance counselor or school psychologist. If these personnel are not available the principal should be notified and outside assistance could also be sought.

Solutions

The solution to this problem should go back to how you can most easily achieve your objective. It would appear that Billy himself handed the answer to this dilemma to you. He gave you a consequence he did not wish to face. He was fearful of being thrown out of his parents' house. This consequence must be corroborated to implement your solution.

Implementation

Once you have confirmed with his parents that they have spoken to Billy and learned exactly what they had told him, you are then ready to implement your solution for your immediate problem of getting Billy to improve academically and behaviorally. Although the consequence is outside of your control, you should offer to assist Billy in avoiding the consequence. Provide tutorial assistance and counsel him on exactly the way you expect him to behave in your class. You should also arrange with the guidance counselor for Billy to be counseled regarding his feelings of prejudice.

Evaluation

Your self-assessment of the results in this case study should be easy to recognize. Did you achieve what you set out to do in the time frame you set up? Did Billy's academic performance and behavior improve incrementally by the end of the term as a result of the consequence with which he was faced? It is important to remember

that there should be interim evaluations prior to the final assessment. This affords you the opportunity to fine-tune your solution or change direction if it is not working. If the answer to the prior question of his academic success was yes, congratulations, your solution worked. If the answer was no, then you should go back to your solution and attempt a different approach.

Sample Case Study

Guidance Approach

Sara Ramirez, a thirteen-year-old girl in your eighth-grade social studies class, places her coat and books wherever she chooses, totally disregarding the comfort of her fellow classmates. Students have complained to you but seem to be fearful of addressing Sara directly. Sara comes from a privileged one-parent family in which she has always been the apple of her father's eye. Sara stays with her elderly grandmother when her father is away on business trips, which seems to be most of the time. Sara boasts that she can come and go as she pleases. Sara's mother is fighting for custody, but she is having a difficult time because of her prior drug and mental health issues.

Sara is an average student with definite adolescent tendencies. She is physically mature for her age, dressing way beyond her years, yet at times she acts like a child. She constantly discards her refuse by placing it on a neighbor's desk when she believes no one is looking or throwing it on the floor when they are looking. She is the first to push her way into the wardrobe at dismissal to retrieve her coat. She likes to push other students' chairs about the room thereby creating obstructions so that her classmates have difficulty finding their seats. Sara constantly laughs at the discomfort she creates for her classmates. She teases the boys, and then complains that they are bothering her. During class she is always calling out and gets angry when she is not called on. As a result her class work has deteriorated. You have spoken to her and warned her that her grade would suffer if she continues being disruptive in class. Sara, in true adolescent fashion, "yeses" you to death and continues to misbehave.

IOSIE Analysis Using a Guidance Approach

Identify the Problem

Is the problem Sara's apparent disregard for her classmates? Is it that she appears to be a physically mature child with less than adequate supervision? Is her grandmother too old and her father too distant? Is she reacting to her mother's attempt to gain custody? Could she just be a mean-spirited child, or are there deeper meanings for her antisocial behavior? Is the real problem the deterioration of her grades?

Again, this case study is overburdened with potential problems. Remember this child's specific

actions—throwing papers, pushing, teasing the boys, laughing at others, and calling out—are really not the problem but indications that there is a problem. How do you identify the problems that you wish to address? The key is to prioritize. What is the first role of a teacher? Is it to see that her students are learning? In this case Sara's grades have fallen so her academic needs must be considered. Sara's family life seems to be unstable and uncontrollable. Emotional problems are rampant throughout this case description. Therefore, her immediate problem is to improve her grades. The question is how you attempt to do that while this child is facing so many emotional problems at home that are manifesting themselves in her actions at school.

Objectives

Your objectives are in two interrelated areas: improvement of academic standing and emotional well-being. Your objective should be to have Sara improve her grades before the end of the marking period. A second and concomitant objective should be to help guide Sara through the emotional upheaval in her young life.

Solution

The objectives are easy to establish, but the resolution for Sara may be much more difficult. A guidance approach on your part requires a caring positive relationship with the child. You may want to have a private heart-to-heart in which you encourage Sara to confide in you. You should also explain to Sara that her grades are a major part of her life and must improve. The reason for this is that if Sara could get guidance she could learn to deal with her family environment, which would allow her to work at improving her grades. Her disruptive behavior and antisocial actions in class should stop of their own accord. Once Sara accepts responsibility for her actions and understands that she cannot necessarily change the actions of others, she will be on the path to understanding her problems. Once she understands that she is responsible for choosing her own behavior, she will be better able to deal with the problems she faces.

Implementation

In this case study the implementation is much more difficult than it was in the previous study. In this situation the teacher is expected to assume the role of guide and mentor. These are roles for whom not all are suited. Even if you were suited, the time needed would take away from your primary classroom duties. You would therefore have to seek the assistance of the guidance counselor and involve the family. Most likely the counselor would suggest family counseling as well as individual sessions with Sara. Your role would remain as guide and mentor, yet your actual functions are lessened.

Evaluation

When using a guidance approach, assessment of objectives should be ongoing. Emotional problems can be easily inflamed, especially when parents are fighting over custody. Your evaluation of success should be focused on her academic studies and classroom behavior. The counselor should keep you informed as to the steps she is taking with the child and family. The same cooperation and communication must be established with any outside counseling that might occur. In this case a positive report card would indicate movement in the proper direction.

Sample Case Study

Group-Guidance Approach

Third-grade student Abdul Hussein cries continually during your class. He complains that everyone is picking on him because of his religious beliefs and because he is Arabic. Abdul's behavior has gone from being cooperative, practically docile, to sulking and at times raging at his classmates. Recently Abdul's class work has gone from exceptional to abysmal. You have never seen any of the incidents even though they have been graphically described by Abdul and just as vocally denied by his classmates. The incidents described consist of stolen or spoiled lunches, torn textbook pages, missing homework, and obscene drawings in Abdul's notebooks. Abdul further claims that the other children claim he is responsible for 9/11. Abdul cries when he tells you that his uncle was killed in the World Trade Center while working. He implies that the children call him a liar and they blaspheme his faith. Abdul's parents have complained to you and request that you do something to stop the harassment of their son.

The president of the parents' association, whose son is also in your class, claims that her child thinks Abdul is a compulsive liar and is just acting the way he does to get your attention. She also claims that someone has been destroying other children's property in the class. She believes it is Abdul. Other parents of children in the class concur with the parents' association president. The situation comes to a head when you see the children fighting in the schoolyard at lunchtime. The children claim that Abdul attacked them when they said they would not play with him. He spit at them and called them dirty names.

IOSIE Analysis Using a Group-Guidance Approach

Identify the Problem

Is the problem Abdul's constant crying and whining during class time? Is it the charges of bias toward Abdul's religion and ethnicity? Is it the multitude of incidents in which Abdul's property has been despoiled? Or is it Abdul's academic performance? In this case study there seems to be a clear link between Abdul's academic per-

formance and the incidents, real or imaginary, that have occurred recently. These incidents appear to have been motivated by group racial bias. In this case there are three distinct and interrelated problems that must be addressed: academic performance, racial and religious issues, and physical incidents of misbehavior.

Objectives

Your first objective is to have Abdul return to doing his superior academic work, while simultaneously educating the class with regard to racial and religious bias as well as eliminating incidents of violence and vandalism. If the first two objectives are achieved, the incidents will also end. The physical episodes are a direct result of the apparent racial intolerance that seems to have infected the class.

Solution

The solution is based on dealing with the question of group tolerance. Guide the class to solve the problem by using a group guidance exercise. Prepare the class by having them read a children's version of *The Diary of Anne Frank* at home with their parents. Read it aloud to the class during a block of instructional time set aside specifically for this purpose. The project requires dividing the class into two subgroups by drawing straws out of a hat. The groups consist of those with red circles and those with green circles, which the children must prominently display on their clothing. The children with the red circles are to make all of the class rules, which must be obeyed by all green circle children. Focus the class by establishing the first three rules:

1. Green-circle children must never line up before a red-circle child at entrance, dismissal, or lunchtime; they must always walk at the back of the line.
2. Green-circle children must keep their heads lower than red-circle children at all times and never look them in the eyes.
3. In any discussion between circle children, the red-circle children will always be considered correct.

The class at the end of the experiment (no more than two days) will evaluate the impact and the result of creating an intolerant society in which there are rulers and second-class citizens. They will be asked to describe their feelings with regard to injustice and intolerance.

Implementation

To implement a scenario as described above takes the cooperation and support of parents, administration, and various mental health providers. The purpose of the exercise should be explained to parents, and be supported by the school administration. Mental health providers such as the school guidance counselor, school psychologist, and outside defamation organizations should be involved.

Evaluation

Assessments when dealing with mental health problems can only be made by evaluating the end product. What did the children describe as their feelings? Did the class want to continue the project? Have the incidents stopped and has Abdul stopped crying, and been allowed to rejoin the class? If the exercise achieves all of its objectives, it is a success.

It should be noted that a group-guidance approach is froth with potential for manipulation (Landau 2000). It is not necessary to be objective when dealing with a situation as described in this case. One should realize, however, that as human beings we do not see resolutions through the same perspective. Children must be given the opportunity to develop their critical-thinking abilities if we are to truly function as a democratic society. A democratic classroom is the single best precursor for a free and democratic nation.

Conclusion

The IOSIE management model is essentially a common sense way for analyzing student behavioral problems. It is a user-friendly approach that provides a framework for teachers to use in resolving the mul-

titude of management problems faced every day. The mnemonic IOSIE applied properly acts as a rubric for guiding teacher actions needed to resolve student behavioral problems. The method provides teachers a strategy to analyze and resolve common, and some not so common, behavioral problems.

REFERENCES

- Canter, L., and M. Canter. 1976. *Assertive discipline: A take charge approach for today's educator*. Seal Beach, CA: Canter and Associates.
- Curwin, R. 1997. Discipline with dignity: Beyond obedience. *Education Digest*. December 11-14.
- Danforth, S., and J. R. Boyle. 2000. *Cases in behavior management*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice Hall.
- Gathercoal, P. 1993. *Judicious discipline*. 3rd ed. San Francisco: Caddo Gap.
- Glasser, W. 1990. *The quality school*. New York: Harper and Row.
- . 1997. A new look at school failure and school success. *Phi Delta Kappan* 78:596-602.
- . 1999. *Choice theory: A new psychology of personnel freedom*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Landau, B., and P. Gathercoal. 2000. Creating peaceful classrooms: Judicious discipline and class meetings. *Phi Delta Kappan* 81:450-54.
- Mager, F. R., and P. Piper. 1997. *Analyzing performance problems: Or you really oughta wanna*. 3rd ed. Atlanta: Center for Effective Performance.
- Scarpaci, R. 2007. *A case study approach to classroom management*. New York: Allyn and Bacon.



COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

TITLE: IOSIE: A Method for Analyzing Student Behavioral Problems

SOURCE: The Clearing House 80 no3 Ja/F 2007

PAGE(S): 111-16

The magazine publisher is the copyright holder of this article and it is reproduced with permission. Further reproduction of this article in violation of the copyright is prohibited. To contact the publisher:
<http://www.heldref.org/>